



## Taking Care of a Grandparent Lesson Plan

### Introduction

Conflicts and hassles are common in any living situation. The issues involved in multigenerational households, however, are somewhat different from those in two-generational households. When grandparents, their adult children and grandchildren reside together, confusion over expectations, independence and divided loyalties are common. Since it usually is easier to see solutions to problems in someone else's family, this activity uses a case study approach to examine the dynamics in eldercare-giving families. The suggested activity and handouts can be adapted for after-school student groups or peer counseling programs. They also can be adapted as secondary classroom exercises in health, home economics or social studies courses.

While pupil personnel specialists are trained to consider the parent-child relationship, they are less likely to explore the effects of multigenerational family relationships on young people. This exercise may be used to sensitize pupil personnel specialists and the teaching faculty to the significant influence multigenerational family issues may have on young people.

### Objectives

Students will:

- analyze family roles and relationships in a case study;
- consider how different circumstances can affect family dynamics; and
- identify advantages and disadvantages of taking care of a grandparent.

### Key Terms

caregiving, eldercare

### Materials

Handouts: "A Case Study," "Assessing The Family Situation," "What If...," "Family Considerations" and "What Can You Do?"

### Procedures

- If this activity is being used with a new group, allow sufficient time for personal introductions. Then pose the question, "Why is it important for young people to consider family circumstances when taking care of an older relative, like a grandparent?" Entertain answers from participants, but do not solicit personal experiences.
- Hand out the case study and invite a participant to read it aloud to the group. After reading the case study, ask participants, "How realistic or common is this family situation?" Responses usually consist of affirmative mumbles and head nods. The question is designed so that participants reflect on their own situations. The idea that they are not alone is reinforced.

- Arrange participants in groups of about four. Allow participants approximately 15 minutes to discuss questions on the ~ "The Family Situation"
- With the entire group, encourage participants to share comments on family issues which might arise in multigenerational households. Encourage additional comments to relevant questions such as: Is it the grandmother's fault? Should she be made the scapegoat for family problems? Emphasize that both positive and negative effects can be found in almost any situation.
- If time permits, or in a future meeting, introduce the handout "What if...". After discussing some of the possibilities, invite participants to add other "What if..." statements. Most participants will draw from their own experiences. For example, what if the grandparent has Alzheimer's Disease? What if the family is struggling financially?

#### Extension Activity

- Request information from the Alzheimer's Association 1-800-621-0379. One helpful pamphlet is titled "Alzheimer's Disease: Especially for Teenagers."

## A Case Study – Taking Care of a Grandparent

Julie, 42, and Harold, 48, have been married 25 years. Harold has worked for a small company for the past 20 years and recently was promoted to a higher supervisory position. Julie devoted her attention to caring for their four children, but has worked part time at a department store for the past three years to help with family expenses.

Julie's widowed mother, Ethel, 76, has temporarily moved into Julie and Harold's home after being hospitalized for a mild stroke. Ethel hopes her health will improve so she will be able to move back to her own apartment soon. Julie and her mother always were very close. For years, Harold tolerated the daily phone conversations between Julie and her mother. But that was mild compared to the attention his mother-in-law is getting now. Julie and her mother enjoy sorting through old family photographs. More than anything else, Julie wants her mother to feel wanted.

Both Julie and Harold are concerned that the present living arrangements will become permanent, but neither has discussed the matter with each other or with Ethel. Both realize that Ethel's vision and hearing loss limit her mobility. Harold also is keenly aware of his own parents' declining health and fears what will happen to them in the future.

Julie and Harold's oldest daughter, Debbie, 21, is married, lives an hour away, has a 2-year-old boy and is expecting her second baby. Julie and Harold like to keep their grandson on weekends when Debbie works. Debbie wants to visit her grandmother but has not had time.

Jillian, 18, is a high school senior and is involved in several after-school activities. Jillian is a good student and has been accepted to the college of her choice. Jillian was closest to her grandmother and did not mind that her grandmother moved in with them. However, she does not like to keep grandma company after school while her parents are at work. Several times she has refused after-school invitations and is embarrassed to invite friends to her house.

Todd, 16, has never liked being the only boy in the family. Outside of school he spends most of his time with friends. Julie and Harold worry about Todd's occasional drinking and his irresponsible, trouble-making friends. Todd has a casual, but not particularly close, relationship with his grandmother. Since she moved in, Todd spends more time away from home.

Lana, 11, is the "baby" in the family. Lana usually gets her way around the house without too much fuss. Even before Ethel moved in, Lana spent a lot of time with her grandmother. Her grandmother had time for her, unlike her parents or siblings.

Julie's older brother lives nearby but frequently is out of town on business. He visits two or three times a month, usually bringing a small gift for his mother. Julie's two younger sisters live an hour away. One is especially critical of their mother occasionally being left alone. The other sister cannot bear to see her mother so frail and avoids visiting and discussing any of the problems.

## Assessing the Family Situation – Taking Care of a Grandparent

1. What does the brief description on page 22 suggest about Ethel's relationship with the following?

- a. daughter, Julie
- b. son-in-law, Harold
- c. grandchildren:
  - a) Debbie
  - b) Jillian
  - c) Todd
  - d) Lana
- d. other grown children, Julie's brother and sisters

2. As Julie and her family assume the responsibilities for taking care of Ethel, what positive and negative effects might result for the following?

- a. Ethel
- b. Julie
- c. Harold
- d. Debbie
- e. Jillian
- f. Todd
- g. Lana
- h. Julie's siblings

3. What can each family member do to help make the situation better?

- a. Ethel
- b. Julie
- c. Harold
- d. Debbie
- e. Jillian
- f. Todd
- g. Lana
- h. Julie's siblings

## What If... – Taking Care of a Grandparent

Directions: Although the case study presents family dynamics within a three-generational family, care-giving circumstances become more complicated with other life events. Discuss how the family situation might be affected under the following circumstances.

1. ... Julie was a single parent?
2. ... Harold's parents needed assistance as well?
3. ... Harold lost his job?
4. ... Jillian, Todd and Lana were younger children in elementary and middle school?
5. ... Jillian and Todd moved out of the house?
6. ... Debbie divorced and wanted to move back home?
7. ... Jillian, Todd or Lana came to you for help?
8. ... this was your family?

## Family Considerations – Taking Care of a Grandparent

Directions: Below are statements about possibilities and challenges of families that provide care to an older relative. What do you think about each statement? Do you agree or disagree? How would you elaborate or clarify points made in the statements?

1. All members of the family - young and old - are affected by changes involving care of an older relative.
2. Family members may be motivated to help older persons for a variety of reasons: love, respect, fear, shame, anger and/or guilt. Most have an overriding sense of obligation.
3. A troubled husband/wife or parent/child relationship may become more troubled with the added demands of eldercare giving.
4. Caring for an older family member can be a mutually rewarding and satisfying family experience. Families can benefit from helping their older members. By working together to find the best possible solutions to difficult problems, families build new relationships and strengthen old ones.
5. The major goal is to strengthen the family. This includes minimizing the stress for any one person while maximizing the independence of the older person to the extent possible.

## What Can You Do? – Taking Care of a Grandparent

At times a young person may feel helpless if a grandparent or older relative becomes physically or psychologically impaired. While no one can stop the declining health condition of a loved one, here are some suggestions young people can use to manage grandparent care.

- Be informed. Learn about the health problems affecting your grandparents. What are the causes? Symptoms? Remedies?
- Be balanced. Involvement of family members varies widely from denial and withdrawal to over-involvement. Persons who remove themselves totally from the situation are not helpful. Those who become overly involved may lose their own emotional perspective and neglect other responsibilities.
- Be realistic. Family irritations can come from unrealistic expectations of what you and family members can do. Do not expect more from yourself, older relatives or other family members than is realistic.
- Be open. Share your questions, concerns and suggestions. Talk with others in your family. Let your friends know what you are going through. It may help to talk with your teachers or school counselor.
- Be calm. While it is normal to become angry and frustrated in difficult situations, "blowing off steam" does not help. A positive approach encourages positive answers.
- Be positive. Your smiles and cheerful attitude can make a difference.
- Be helpful. If your family is taking care of an older relative, you can help by volunteering for extra household chores.
- Be accepting. In situations which cannot be changed, the only thing to do is cope.